DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 393 844 SP 036 615

AUTHOR Hillkirk, Keith; Skinner-Morris, Sarah Jane
TITLE Teacher Perceptions of the CARE Program: An Alternative Teacher Preparation Program That Emphasizes Democratic Teaching and Active Learning.
PUB DATE 94
NOTE 13p.
PUB TYPE Tests/Evaluation Instruments (160) -- Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Active Learning; College School Cooperation; Elementary Secondary Education; Higher Education; Interviews; *Partnerships in Education; *Practicum Supervision; Preservice Teacher Education; *Program Evaluation; Student Teacher Evaluation; *Student Teaching; *Teacher Attitudes; *Teacher Education Programs; Teaching Experience
IDENTIFIERS Ohio University

ABSTRACT

This paper reports on the feedback obtained from Ohio public school teachers who supervised the Creating Active and Reflective Educators (CARE) program students, initially called the Teacher Education for Civic Responsibility (TECR) program, during its first 4 years, from 1989-1993. The first group of 11 students were accepted into TECR in 1989; this report is based on responses from 33 elementary and secondary school teachers in 1993. CARE's premise is based on Thomas Jefferson's and John Dewey's beliefs and writings on the connections between democracy and education. This interview consisted of 12, open-ended questions developed by a graduate student, and a faculty member from the College of Education. Interviews were audiotaped and transcribed; interviewees remained anonymous. Results for each of the 12 questions are presented individually. Overall, teacher perceptions of CARE were positive; they believed that CARE students benefitted greatly by the additional practicum work. Perceptions of the students by the teachers were also positive, although some concern was expressed for the limited number of students and a feeling by CARE students that they were special. Overall, teachers perceived CARE students as resourceful and dedicated with satisfactory subject matter knowledge. Since the interviews, the number of students has been increased and additional partnerships with area schools have been developed. (NAV)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 393 844

Teacher Perceptions of the CARE Program: An Alternative Teacher Preparation Program that Emphasizes Democratic Teaching and Active Learning

Keith Hillkirk
Sarah Jane Skinner-Morris
College of Education
Ohio University
December 20, 1994

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND
DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL
HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
K. Hillkirk

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES
INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

S1836615

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Teacher Perceptions of the CARE Program

Purpose of this formative evaluation

The purpose of this study was to collect feedback from public school teachers who supervised TECR and CARE students during the program's first four years, 1989-1993. The Teacher Education for Civic Responsibility (TECR) program began in the 1989-90 academic year; two years later the name of the program was changed to the Creating Active and Reflective Educators (CARE) program to coincide with the inititation of a broader partnership relationship between the Federal Hocking Local School District and the Ohio University College of Education.

The Teacher Education for Civic Responsibility Program was initiated by a proposal to the Fund for the Improvement of Post-Secondary Education (FIPSE). When the project was funded by FIPSE, the first group of 11 students were accepted into the program in the Fall of 1989.

Faculty who developed and taught in the program agreed that it was critical that preservice teachers understand the origins of public schooling in the United States, particularly the Jeffersonian premise that an educated citizenry is essential to a healthy democracy. Jefferson's and John Dewey's beliefs and writings about the connections between democracy and education provided a rationale for the program's curriculum and its ongoing focus on student-centered teaching and learning.

A more detailed history of the origins and focus of the above program(s) is provided in "An Experiment in Teacher Preparation: Teacher Education for Civic Responsibility" (Hillkirk, McMath, Reeves, Smith-Singleton, and Smith, 1994).

Description of population studied

Thirty-three elementary and secondary teachers were interviewed for this study during Spring and Summer of 1993. The interviewer was a doctoral student in the College of Education. The interview protocol which is

provided below was developed by the interviewer and the author, a faculty member in the College of Education. Interviews were audiotaped and later transcribed by the doctoral student. Interviewees were guaranteed anonymity by the interviewer.

Interview protocol

The following questions were asked in each interview; interviews were open-ended with opportunity provided for the interviewee to expand answers and provide as much detail as s/he wished.

Interview questions:

1. What was your previous involvement with the CARE Program?

2. What were your reasons for deciding to become involved in the CARE Program in the first place and agreeing to take CARE students in your room?

3. Please describe any benefits that you receive by having CARE students come into your room.

4. What are your general impressions of CARE students?

5. Can you identify in detail the specific strengths you perceive in the CARE students?

6. Please explain any problems that you have encountered while working with CARE students.

7. Please compare and contrast CARE students with traditional program education students.

8. Are you aware of the underlying philosophical assumptions of the CARE Program, or if not can you guess the program's philosophy from your impression of CARE students?

9. For what reasons would you like to have a CARE graduate as a

professional colleague?

10. What suggestions do you have for improving the CARE Program?

11. Would you like to make any additional comments about the CARE Program?

12. Please describe your feelings concerning the quality of the subject matter knowledge within their fields that the CARE students received during their academic preparation at Ohio University.

Presentation of the Findings

In the following section, significant findings are discussed. To minimize misinterpretation of teacher comments, exact quotations of teacher responses are provided for most questions.

Question 1: What was your previous involvement with the CARE Program?

Teacher-interviewee involvement with the CARE Program ranged from one teacher who had worked with only one CARE student student teacher to several teachers who had worked with eight or more CARE students in early field experiences and/or student teaching.

Question 2: What were your reasons for deciding to become involved in the CARE program in the first place and agreeing to take CARE students in your room?

Teacher responses to this question included the following comments:

a. Personal requests by O.U. faculty
b. Membership in the Institute for Democracy in Education, a group of educators interested in connections between

democracy and education
c. Personal requests by university students
d. A desire to help pre-service teachers
e. Wanting extra help in the classroom

One interviewee responded at length to this question. Excerpts of this teacher's comments are quoted below:

"I just feel like I went through the Ohio University College of Education too 20 years ago. There were a couple of professors at the time who were real interested in alternative education and things sounded like they could get real exciting and that's really why I went into teaching. And then not much happened at McCracken and I felt like basically my education there was for the most part less than innovative for sure and just left a lot to be desired. So that when I heard there was going to be a whole different program for students that wouldn't be as traditional, I felt, well, finally at last it sounds like there's going to be something exciting going on."

Aspects of the CARE Program that particularly intrigued this teacher included "the whole notion of it being a group of students that kind of worked through the program together so that they really got to know each other," "the aspect that you'd be with people who were in K through high school so you'd get like a little bit bigger picture of education," and "more thoughtful kinds of classes where you'd actually be thinking a little bit more about the philosophy of education, a lot more sociology kinds of things, as well as methods classes."

Question 3: Please describe any benefits that you receive by having CARE students come into your room.

Benefits identified by teachers included

a. Extra help in the classroom
b. Ability to do more for my students
c. Able to provide extra attention to students who need it
d. CARE students get to know the class better because they

return for more than one quarter

e. CARE students seem "to have an idea about what their philosophy of education might be and understand that this is an opportunity for them to see it in action"
f. "They tend to share a similar philosophy as mine and so we can sort of speak the same language"
g. "They're responsible, I know they're going to show up and they will do anything"
h. A specific comment about a student: "She made the students feel as if someone else cared beside Mom and Dad."

Question 4: What are your general impressions of CARE students?

Teacher responses included the following comments:

a. "Really good, real thoughtful, careful, caring students"
b. "They're motivated and they're better organized I think in terms of what they're trying to accomplish than some of the other students that I've had in methods classes."
c. "They seem to want to make a difference and not just get through the teacher ed program."
d. Hard-working
e. Committed

As with the above comments, most impressions were positive. However, one teacher observed that "as the other students who weren't in the program have come into my classroom and helped kids and seemed to enjoy children, that's what those two [CARE students] have shown me as well. But I can't say that it's that I see any potential there that I wouldn't see from any OU student."

In addition, two teachers stated that they think CARE students are elitist. While neither teacher provided a detailed rationale for this opinion, one teacher commented "They're very elitist. I think they're in a cloud, and they're probably good teachers, and I think they probably will be good teachers."

The teacher went on to criticize the program's emphasis on cooperative learning and student-centered teaching. The charge of elitism seemed to stem from the teacher's opinion that CARE students don't understand how complex teaching is and that it will be more difficult than they think to achieve their goals.

Question 5: Can you identify in detail the specific strengths you perceive within the CARE students?

Teacher responses to this question included the following comments:

a. "CARE students have the advantage that more lab experience gives them, more chances to try and see how the theory is implemented than the other students."
b. "They don't see kids in just one quarter . . . And then forget about them and go to another child, but they have an opportunity to see growth in that child."
c. "They're very serious in their philosophical beliefs and teaching style."
d. "I think they realize that, you know, teaching is not just 8:45 till 3:45. There's a lot more to it and I think these students are really getting that."
e. "They're definitely not afraid of hard work."
f. One teacher noted that s/he had not "seen any techniques or methods unique to special education, you know, in terms of my own, personal profession, special education. She's not made herself distinctive from the others."

Question 6: Please explain any problems that you have encountered while working with CARE students in the CARE Program?

Twenty-six of the 33 teachers indicated they had no problems. The other seven teachers' comments were as follows

a. This teacher commented that CARE students' journals bothered her until she was invited to read the journals.

b. Another teacher stated that one CARE student seemed to have "more support with the girls than with the boys."
c. A third teacher felt that the CARE Program's emphasis on democratic process was not as appropriate in the special education classroom.
d. Two teachers expressed frustration that communication between professors and teachers was lacking in both the traditional and CARE programs.
e. This teacher stated that s/he had worked with a CARE student who "did not take criticism well."
f. Finally, a teacher stated that "CARE students are just like overzealous right now" and that s/he felt the CARE students were unrealistic in their expectations about teaching.

Question 7: Please compare and contrast CARE students with traditional program students.

a. "I think they're [CARE students], in general, more clear on what they want to do and more interested in educational theory and practice than education students in general who might be interested in practice but not so much in theory."
b. "I think maybe CARE students asked some really good questions, and they were a little bit more aware maybe of what was going on in every room, particularly with sort of democratic fashions that I try to portray in my classroom."
c. "The majority of those seem a lot more enthusiastic . . . and seem to be able to just move in the classroom and work right away with the kids."
d. "I think the CARE students have a tendency of thinking things through a little bit more--looking at the big picture, at the student's whole self, you know."

These teachers generally appear to perceive CARE students as resourceful and dedicated.

Question 8: Are you aware of the underlying assumptions of the CARE Program, or if not, can you guess the program's philosophy from your impressions of CARE students?

Overall, teachers appeared to have a general sense of the philosophy and intent of the CARE Program, based primarily on informal conversations with, and observations of, CARE students.

Teachers mentioned the following concepts and themes in their responses:

a. Teaching for social responsibilities
b. Looking at both academics and respect and responsibility
c. Project-centered education
d. Democratic education
e. Letting the children be the core
f. A classroom community
g. To involve community
h. "Democratic practices with aims of creating democratic practitioners who are able to create democratic classrooms"
I. Learner centered
j. Giving students "chances to practice citizenship or democracy"

Question 9: For what reasons would you like to have a CARE graduate as a professional colleague?

Teacher responses to this question centered around the additional field experiences that CARE students receive compared to the traditional program. Examples of teacher comments include

a. "I'd take the CARE student in a minute, okay, because they've got more hands-on experience with the kids. They've seen more different teaching styles from the different teachers they've worked with. They've had experience with different grade levels."
b. "I think in CARE they've been working collaboratively and I think the future of education is teachers collaborating."
c. "I want to put on tape I think it's an elitist system that's

happening in McCracken, and I don't think it's fair so I think looking at it I'd probably take the CARE student just because I know the incredible opportunities that they've had in their education."

Question 10: What suggestions do you have for improving the CARE Program?

Responses to this question varied widely from four teachers who stated the program should be expanded, to several who offered no suggestions, to one teacher who said, "Oh, gosh, get rid of it."

Individual suggestions also included

a. Improved university-school communication
b. Getting rid of an elitist attitude
c. Getting CARE students involved in community projects outside the school

Question 11: Would you like to make any additional comments about the CARE Program?

The most common response to this question (12 teachers) was that they felt very positive about the CARE Program. Several teachers stated that they would like to see more students involved.

One teacher again criticized the program for being elitist and added that "it's a shame, a crying shame, that all OU students aren't given this sort of education."

Question 12: Please describe your feelings concerning the quality of the subject matter knowledge within their fields that the CARE students received during their academic preparation at Ohio University.

One teacher stated that in her English classroom she found herself explaining literary devices which she felt her CARE student should have known; this teacher also noted that the student made occasional

misspellings.

Otherwise, teachers expressed satisfaction with the subject matter knowledge of CARE students.

Reflections on the Findings

Generally, teacher perceptions of the CARE Program appeared to be quite positive at the time of the interviews in the Spring and Summer of 1993. Repeatedly these teachers stressed their beliefs that preservice teachers need more field work and that CARE students benefit by their additional practicum experience.

Teachers also indicated that they believe CARE students benefit by returning to the same classrooms for additional work with the same teacher. Other reports from student teachers, supervisors, and cooperating teachers in the CARE Program support this argument in relation to the enhanced quality of the student teaching experience when the student teacher is returning to a familiar classroom and cooperating teacher.

Except for the charge of elitism mentioned by two teachers, teacher perceptions of CARE students were generally positive, as well. Elitism appeared to be defined in two ways: the program's perceived exclusiveness in not being available to more students and also in the sense that CARE students were sometimes seen by these teachers as thinking of themselves as special.

Since the time of the interviews, two attempts have been made to respond to the concern that more students need to have access to the CARE Program. First, the CARE Program has grown to include 30 students in the most recently admitted cohort group; this number represents three times the students in the original cohort of 11 admitted to the program seven years ago.

Secondly, the College of Education continues to develop additional partnership relationships with area schools. As of Winter 1996, College students can apply for acceptance into one of four partnerships that

include nine schools; several additional partnerships are currently being initiated, as well.

References

Hillkirk, K., McMath, J., Reeves, B., Smith-Singleton,M., & Smith, W. (1994). "An Experiment in Teacher Preparation: Teacher Education for Civic Responsibility." *Teacher Education Quarterly* 21(3), 47-57.